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**“THE TWISTED HANDIWORK OF EGYPT” AND
HEIDEGGER’S QUESTION CONCERNING CULTURE**

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“THE TWISTED HANDIWORK OF EGYPT” AND HEIDEGGER’S QUESTION CONCERNING CULTURE

In the first paragraph of his essay “The Age of the World Picture,” Heidegger says something of utmost importance for and about our times. In this paper, I want to say why this is the case. The paragraph reads:ⁱ

In metaphysics reflection [die Besinnung] is accomplished concerning the essence [das Wesen] of what is [des Seienden] and a decision [eine Entscheidung] takes place regarding the essence of truth [das Wesen der Wahrheit]. Metaphysics grounds an age [ein Zeitalter], in that through a specific interpretation of what is [eine bestimmte Auslegung des Seienden] and through a specific comprehension of truth [eine bestimmte Auffassung der Wahrheit] it gives to that age the basis [Grund] upon which it is essentially formed. This basis holds complete dominion over all the phenomena [Erscheinungen] that distinguish the age. Conversely, in order that there may be an adequate reflection upon these phenomena themselves, the metaphysical basis for them must let itself be apprehended in them. Reflection is the courage [der Mut] to make the truth of our own presuppositions and the realm of our own goals into the things that most deserve to be called in question. (AWP 115; 75)

Before we get to this critical paragraph itself, we need to think about the title “The Age of the World Picture” and its several terms, as well as about the expression “our times.” First, the title: the days of the fashionability of the term “world picture” are, as I write at the start of the 21st century, long gone. That term seems to us, today, to mark an historicism that is already an item for investigation by the history of ideas. It may have begun with Spengler, but it had its heyday among such writers as Karl Mannheim (“On the Interpretation of Weltanschauung”),

E.M.W Tillyard (The Elizabethan World Picture), Lucien Goldmann (The Hidden God and its “vision du monde”) and Michel Foucault (The Order of Things and its “epistémé”), not to mention the whole detour through “ideology.”ⁱⁱ And no doubt the great forebear of the “world picture” is Herder’s Volksgeist.ⁱⁱⁱ But cultural historicism is far from Heidegger’s sights as he levels this first paragraph of a paper about the age of the world picture. Still less, by employing the word “age” or “time” (die Zeit), is he trying to out-historicise this historicism by, as it were, simply confining it to its own age or time. This is, then, far from a kind of meta-historicism.

The age or time that Heidegger does bring before us in this essay is no less than the whole of modernity (Neuzeit), the new age, the new time. And its inception is marked, as in so many instances for Heidegger, by the Cartesian cogito. The time or age, then, is the time from Descartes’ Meditations (1641)--perhaps even before--to Heidegger’s present (1938)--perhaps even beyond. And what marks this age of modernity is its world picture. But, if this is not the world picture of the historicists, then what?

This age of modernity, for Heidegger, is a time in which there simply is a world picture; or, rather, in which the world becomes a picture: “The fundamental event of the modern age is the conquest of the world as picture” [Der Grundvorgang der Neuzeit ist die Eroberung der Welt als Bild] (AWP 134; 94). So, “world picture” is to be read as “world as picture.” And, perhaps echoing Schopenhauer via Nietzsche, the world as picture is equivalent to the world as representation. The difference, however, is that while Schopenhauer makes an explicit philosophy on the grounding idea that “The world is my representation”^{iv} --that everything that is is an object for a subject and nothing more (such that things can never be, strictly, “in themselves”)--Heidegger gives this “picturing” an entirely different status. With Heidegger, the picturing relation to the world, the

“philosophy of representation,” is always already implicit in all the thinking of modernity from Descartes to Nietzsche. Schopenhauer’s explicitation of it--which he calls “this thought . . . which has been sought for a very long time under the name of philosophy, and . . . whose discovery is for this very reason regarded by those versed in history just as impossible as the philosophers’ stone”^v--is merely that, an explicitation, hence no discovery and certainly no philosophers’ stone. What Schopenhauer explicits, if Heidegger is right, every thinker of modernity must, at ground, necessarily think. This, then, is the age in which the world has become a picture, a representation. What does this mean?

Derrida is lyrically sceptical of Heidegger’s claim, in this very essay (“The Age of the World Picture”) about the possibility of the totalisation of modern thought by representational thinking. He asks, in effect, if the collection of all thought (at least in our times, in modernity) by a single term is not, itself, a kind of totalisation. He asks whether:^{vi}

. . . in the very interior of what offers itself as the philosophical or merely theoretical usage of the word [“]representation[“], the unity of some semantic center, which would give order to a whole multiplicity of modifications and derivations, is to be presumed. (SOR 320)

And, even if it is not to be presumed, then some other, even less definite, unity must underpin the thought (attributable to Heidegger) that all modern thought is representational. This may have to do with thought in general, in its essence, and it certainly has to do with all “collecting” and “grouping” together. Derrida refers to it as the envoi, the sending, a sending forth with no guarantee of arriving--perhaps even of arriving at such a definite concept as representation as the figure of our particular epoch. And so:

In order for the epoch of representation [= the age of the world picture] to have its sense and its unity as an epoch, it must belong to the grouping (rassemblement) of a more original (originaire) and more powerful envoi.

And if there had not been the grouping of this envoi, the Geschick [fate, destiny]^{vii} of being, if this Geschick had not announced itself from the start as the Anwesenheit [presence] of being, no interpretation of the epoch of representation would come to order it in the unity of a history of metaphysics. . . . This grouping is the condition, the being-together of what offers itself to thought in order for an epochal figure--here that of representation--to detach itself in its contour and order itself in its rhythm in the unity of a destination, or rather a “destinality,” of being. (SOR 321)

This is a significant statement whether we position Derrida, at this point, as disciple or as critic of Heidegger. Here a critical part of the Heideggerian vocabulary is used to alert us to its author’s proposal of a “unity” lying behind every “epochal figure” such as, for Heidegger, representation. Here Derrida discovers and homes in on the centre, not only of Heideggerian philosophy, but also of Heidegger’s history of metaphysics which, arguably, is the raison d’être for his counter-representationalist analytic of being. Heidegger himself explains the question of sending/destining, in “The Question Concerning Technology” as follows:^{viii}

The essence of modern technology starts man upon the way of that revealing through which the real everywhere, more or less distinctly, becomes standing-reserve [Bestand]. “To start upon a way” means “to send” in our ordinary language. We shall call that sending-that-gathers [versammelnde Schicken] which first starts man upon a way of revealing, destining [Geschick]. (QCT 24)

Accordingly, any kind of revealing (and below, we shall mention the particular kind that technological, cultural and representational thinking are, conjointly, for Heidegger) is, in essence, a starting upon a way, a sending, an envoi. And, as Derrida goes on to say “It is in basing itself on this grouped indivisibility of the envoi that Heidegger’s reading can single out (détacher) epochs, including the most dangerous of all, the epoch of representation in modern times” (SOR 322).

But does this indivisibility (does any indivisibility) hold? Derrida thinks otherwise:

If there has been representation, it is perhaps (and Heidegger would recognize this) just because the envoi of being was originally menaced in its being-together, in its Geschick, by divisibility or dissension (what I would call dissemination). Can we not then conclude that if there has been representation, the epochal reading Heidegger proposes for it becomes, in virtue of this fact, problematic from the beginning, at least as a normative reading (and it wishes to be this also), if not as an open questioning of what offers itself to thought beyond the problematic, and even beyond the question as a question of being, of a grouped destiny or of the envoi of being [?] (SOR 322-23)

And so, representational thinking, as the way of characterising the history of modern metaphysics, itself becomes, under Derrida's account, not only a kind of totalisation but one founded on "the grouping of a more original and more powerful envoi." Behind the idea that all modern ideas of presence (Anwesenheit) must be representational (that they must involve, primarily, man-as-subject taking what is as an object) lies a "sending" (envoi) that guarantees it. And this sending is, despite appearing as a unity, in fact "menaced" from the start by "divisibility or dissension," by "dissemination." And we know, from much of the rest of Derrida's work (and not least his "Envois"), that what is being found here is the central idea that no starting upon a way, no sending forth of anything to its destiny, is guaranteed to arrive. It may indeed arrive; but the absence of a guarantee always shows that what would be destining (Geschick) is always also accompanied, at the moment and event of its sending forth, by a-destining.

But, there is also a crucial sense in which this very "sending," this envoi, the disseminational envoi of Derrida's philosophy--complete with its critical a-destinality (and this is important)--is itself an integral part of the counter-

representational philosophy that Heidegger announces as early as Being and Time.^{ix} So, to paraphrase Derrida (SOR 322), my question then is the following, and I formulate it too quickly: might it also be said that without this philosophy (or, at least, without one extremely like it) there would be no possibility of the envois that grounds the Derridean critique of the “centrality” of representation to Heidegger’s history of metaphysics?

To put this another way: how can “sending” (envois) be seen at work in Being and Time and, moreover, precisely at the point of that early work’s critique of representation? While this is hard to read off either the German or the English text, an early and celebratory reading by Derrida’s mentor and fellow countryman, Emmanuel Levinas, brings this to light. What Heidegger reads as the picturing or representationalist version of thinking man’s relation to the world, Levinas refers to, more narrowly perhaps, as “idealism.” The fact that Heidegger and Levinas mean much the same thing by these terms is clear from the following passage of Levinas’s careful reading:^x

The concept of the subject, understood as a substance having a specific position in the entire domain of being, presents us with difficulties of two kinds. First, how do we understand this leave-taking from the self which the thinking substance brings about and which displays an entirely original aspect? Indeed, we could say that thought, in reaching out toward objects, does not actually take leave of itself, since its objects--considered as ideas and contents of thought--are, in a certain sense, already within it. In order to make sense of this paradox, Descartes had to invoke the existence of a veridical god who guaranteed the correspondence between things and ideas. Furthermore, he had to reflect on truth’s method and criteria--a reflection and preoccupation endemic to modern philosophy. Such reflection [presumably, for example, the Cartesian version of the Besinnung announced by Heidegger at the start of this paper] is a basic requirement

for subjectivity enclosed within itself which must search within its own interior for signs of its conformity with being. From there, it is but a step to idealism. Henceforth, the thinking substance will not have to reunite with extended substance; it will recover that extended substance within itself. The subject itself will constitute its own object. Idealism comes to be one of the consequences both of the Cartesian cogito and of the theories of knowledge whose flourishing has been fostered by this new conception of the subject. (MHO 12)

Clearly, this is the move in the history of metaphysics that Heidegger, throughout his work (including “The Age of the World Picture”), refers to as the positioning of man as sub-iectum, a positioning characteristic of modernity and its several related types of thinking (technological, scientific, cultural and so forth). Heidegger characterises this move, characteristically enough, firstly in terms of the idea of the sub-iectum in general and secondly in terms of the version of it that is particular to modernity (the version that happens, without any necessity, to place man in this position):

What is decisive [with modernity] is not that man frees himself to himself from previous obligations, but that the very essence of man itself changes, in that man becomes subject. We must understand this word subiectum, however, as the translation of the Greek hypokeimenon. The word names that-which-lies-before, which, as ground, gathers everything onto itself. This metaphysical meaning of the concept of the subject has first of all no special relationship to man and none at all to the I. (AWP 128; 88; final emphasis added)

Derrida knows this much about the cruciality of the sub-iectum to Heidegger’s theory of the centrality of representation in the history of modern metaphysics; indeed, he refers to it (SOR 314). What his discussion of the terms “representation” and Vorstellung, however, does not sufficiently emphasise, though it is crucial to Heidegger’s account, is the historically specific event that

arises in metaphysics when the sub-iectum (which “has first of all no special relationship to man”) becomes, actually, in fact, as a particular historical event (Ereignis), narrowed down to the human domain:

However, when man becomes the primary and only real [ersten und eigentlichen] subiectum, that means: Man becomes that being upon which all that is, is grounded as regards the manner of its Being and its truth. Man becomes the relational center of that which is as such. But this is possible only when the comprehension of what is as a whole changes. In what does this change manifest itself? What, in keeping with it, is the essence of the modern age? (AWP 128; 88)^{xi}

In Derrida’s version of this historical shift to modernity, incredibly accurate though it is, the becoming-man of the sub-iectum as such is not mentioned. Instead, the historical shift is discussed solely in terms of “picture” and “representation”:

If we follow Heidegger, the Greek world did not have a relation to what-is as to a conceived image or a representation (here Bild). There what-is is presence; and this did not, at first, derive from the fact that man would look at what-is and have what we call a representation (Vorstellung) of it as the mode of perception of a subject. In a similar way, in another age . . . the Middle Ages relates itself essentially to what-is as to an ens creatum. “To be something that-is” (“être-un-étant”) means to belong to the created order; this thus corresponds to God according to the analogy of what-is (analogia entis), but, says Heidegger, the being of what-is never consists in an object (Gegenstand) brought before man, fixed, stopped, available for the human subject who would possess a representation of it. This will be the mark of modernity. (SOR 307)

Perhaps missing--or perhaps, in this paraphrase, assuming--the prevalence of the sub-iectum as such (which only at a certain time happens to become man), Derrida is able to use such a phrase as “the Cartesian or Cartesian-Hegelian epoch

of the subiectum" (SOR 308). And while this phrase is, no doubt, ambiguous, there is a strong sense in which we can hear Derrida, in this phrase, equating the sub-iectum (which, in general, is anything that lies before) with the particular version of it that Heidegger very explicitly identifies with the event of man and modernity. In this way, Derrida may miss--and, at the least, he de-emphasises--an important aspect of the historicity of Heidegger's account, which is not strictly an account of the history of being itself, but more accurately of the way, the event, in which being has been taken, metaphysically, in modernity. In that way, in that event, "Man comes to be the self-positing ground and measure for all certitude and truth" (N4 90).^{xii} What is, therefore, critical is Heidegger's answer to the question of what it means for man, in particular, among all the possible beings, to become the sub-iectum--to become the only subject, in a certain event or change. And this is the question, raised above, of what "in keeping with it [the change], is the essence of the modern age." As we will be able to guess by now, this essence is the world as picture:

... world picture, when understood essentially, does not mean a picture of the world but the world conceived and grasped as picture. What is, in its entirety, is now taken in such a way that it first is in being and only is in being to the extent that it is set up by man, who represents and sets forth. (AWP 129-130; 89)

... "to represent" [vorstellen]: to set out before oneself and to set forth in relation to oneself. Through this, whatever is comes to a stand as object and in that way alone receives the seal of Being. That the world becomes picture is one and the same event with the event of man's becoming subiectum in the midst of that which is. (AWP 132; 92)

So, in a sense, it matters little whether we use the Latinate term "representation" or the Germanic term Vor-stellung to name this event (this difference being one of the bases of Derrida's argument for critical differences and divisions). For it's clear now that what Heidegger is thinking is that, first of all, regardless of its

subsequent incarnation as “representation,” “picturing,” Vorstellung, or whatever, sub-iectum captures a way of thinking of “standing before” in the general senses of (1) primacy and of (2) something standing before (in front of) something else to which everything is given. Then, subsequently, in the event of modernity, it happens, as a change and perhaps as a chance, that it is man (and no longer, say, the Platonic Greeks’ eidos or the “God” of the Middle Ages) that comes to stand before all other beings as his own “objects.” Sub-iectum as such: “The word names that-which-lies-before, which, as ground, gathers everything onto itself” (AWP 128; 88). Then the characteristically modern inflection of the sub-iectum: here this lying-before becomes Vor-stellung, the idea that what is stands before man-the-subject as what he re-presents. “Here to represent [vorstellen] means to bring what is present at hand [das Vorhandene] before oneself as something standing over against, to relate it to oneself, to the one representing it, and to force it back into this relationship to oneself as the normative realm” (AWP 131; 91).

In a crucial sense, a sense that has to do with the path of thinking, the terms simply do not matter. There is an event in history when man becomes the ground on which everything that is is. This is the event we might also call “modernity” or “the advent of culture” and which effectively reduces the world to the domain of beings (the ontic domain)--of which man is both one and the supreme one--and so effectively obliterates the question of being as such (the ontological domain) for modern metaphysics. To be able to think ontologically, then, as Levinas says in his reading of Being and Time, would be to think outside the ontic and, therefore, outside the field of representation or, perhaps, outside the frame of the (world) picture. Metaphysics, in Heidegger’s positive sense and by contrast with what passes in modernity as metaphysics, is ontological thinking: an untimely thinking, a thinking out of its age and, for that reason, a thinking-out of its age.

How does Levinas read Heidegger's early thinking (in Being and Time) as leading beyond representation? We have already seen the seeds of this in the passage from Levinas quoted earlier: from the advent of modernity "the thinking substance will not have to reunite with extended substance; it will recover that extended substance within itself" (MHO 12). What Levinas finds in this respect, in the version that arises in Being and Time, is that what is crucial to the particular kind of setting-before of representation (Vor-stellung) is what it is that sets everything before it: man as the kind of being that is the thinking substance. What Levinas also finds in Being and Time, by contrast, that leads us to a radical counter-position to this agonising reflection, characteristic of modernity, on the configuration and play between internality and externality, subjectivity and objectivity, man and world, is a completely distinct account of man's being in the world that, crucially, refuses to begin with such representationalist divisions. Instead, it begins with finitude and finite existence: "Finitude will become the very principle of the subject's subjectivity. It is because there is a finite existence--Dasein--that consciousness itself will be possible" (MHO 18). That is, the condition of finitude--later, for Levinas, "finitude and nothingness" which are "defined for Heidegger by 'effectivity' [effectivité] (Faktizität)" (MHO 24)^{xiii}--precedes and makes possible any consideration of consciousness, the thinking substance; that is, it is the condition that grounds and makes possible every account of "man," including the representational account itself. It is only because of finitude, then, that it is at all possible to picture a world in which everything that is is an object for man-as-subject. In a phrase, the sub-iectum (that which has primacy and stands before) of Being and Time is Dasein as finitude.

Moreover, this condition of finitude is realised not by man-as-subject in relation to objects but, instead, by virtue of "the things in the middle of which Dasein effectively lives." And these are "above all, objects of care, of solicitude [sollicitude] (das Besorgte), of handling [maniement] (Umgang)" (MHO 19). In

finitude, it is use--“the handling of the tool”--and not consciousness that gives us access to the tool. Levinas describes this as “movement” and he goes on:

But the movement gains access to objects not only in an original way but also in an originary way; the movement does not follow upon a representation. It is by that above all that Heidegger is opposed to the current opinion--an opinion still shared by Husserl himself--namely, that the representation of what is handled precedes the handling itself. Tools are thus objects that Dasein reveals by a given mode of its existence--handling. Tools are not then simply “things.” Handling is in some way the affirmation of their being. Handling determines not what tools are but the manner in which they encounter Dasein, the manner in which they are. The being of tools is “handlability” [maniabilité] (Zuhandenheit). And it is precisely because handling does not follow upon a representation that handlability is not a simple “presence” [présence] (Vorhandenheit) on which a new property is grafted. Handlability is entirely irreducible. (MHO 19-20)

This insight of Levinas’s is crucial to any reading of Heidegger, early or late. For here is the source of the critique of representational thinking. It is Dasein’s structure of handlability which arises from its primary condition of finitude that speaks against the world-as-picture, in the first place, even from the time of Being and Time. This is the ground on which all counter-representationalist arguments (against Descartes, against Kant and, ultimately, against Nietzsche) are mounted. It is because of finitude’s handlability (or “equipmentality”) that man’s being-in-the-world cannot be primordially representationalist or picturing/picturable. Rather it is handling/handlable.

What is perhaps even more critical to Levinas’s account--and here we return to Derridean territory--is the term he uses to describe the structure of this equipmentality: “What is the structure of this ‘handlability’? It is essentially

constituted by ‘referral’ [renvoi] (Verweisung)” (MHO 20).^{xiv} Now we can, at last, see one possible meaning of Derrida’s envois as always repeated, as renvois (“referrals” or “re-sendings”).^{xv} And, close to the peak of his critique of Heidegger’s envoi (as Geschick), he offers the following incredibly lucid description of the renvois and, in the process, of his own metaphysical position as a whole:

Everything begins by referring back (par le renvois), that is to say, does not begin; and once this breaking open or this partition divides, from the very start, every renvoi, there is not a single renvoi but from then on, always, a multiplicity of renvois, so many different traces referring back to other traces and to traces of others. This divisibility of the envoi has nothing negative about it, it is not a lack, it is altogether different from subject, from signifier, or that letter which Lacan says that it does not withstand partition and that it always reaches its destination. This divisibility or this difference is the condition for there being an envoi, possibly even an envoi of being, a dispensation or a gift of being and time, of the present and of representation. These renvois of traces or these traces of renvois do not have the structure of representatives or of representations, or of signifiers, nor of symbols, nor of metaphors, nor of metonymies, etc. But as these renvois from the other and to the other, these traces of difference, are not original and transcendental conditions on the basis of which philosophy traditionally tries to derive effects, subdeterminations, or even epochs, it cannot be said for example that representative (or signifying or symbolic, etc.) structure befalls them; we shall not be able to assign periods or have some epoch of representation follow upon these renvois. As soon as there are renvois, and it is always already, something like representation no longer waits and we must perhaps arrange to tell this story differently, from renvois of renvois to renvois of renvois, in a destiny which is never certain of gathering itself up, of identifying itself, or of determining itself (I

do not know whether this can be said with or without Heidegger, and it does not matter). (SOR 324-25)

Is it possible that this non-ground, this condition which is a non-transcendental condition, which Derrida finds--possibly with and possibly without Heidegger, though certainly with his help--and which motivates both his own "outside" to representation as well as his questioning of Heidegger's "outside," arises as the very "structure" of handlability which enables that move and that critique in the first place? If so, then this renvoi--though we must, since we are still only questioning, say "these renvois"--for Levinas, is/are the key to the critique of the simple-presence-before-man that lies at the heart of deconstruction, including the deconstruction (SOR 322) of the Heideggerian critique of representation in the "Envoi." And, even against Heidegger's later critique of technology, Levinas positions this renvoi as follows:

The tool is always "in view of" [en vue de] something, because it is not a separate entity, but always in tandem with other tools. Its mode of being entails giving precedence to the totality of the function [oeuvre] in relation to which the tool exists [est]. The tool is efficient in its role, and handlability characterizes its being "in itself" [en soi]; it exists uniquely in its role in the case where handlability is not explicitly present but recedes into the background, and the tool is understood in terms of its function. This function is itself instrumental: the shoe exists in order to be worn, the watch in order to tell the time. But, on the other hand, the productive function makes use of something in view of something else. What is handlable then refers back to materials. We thus discover Nature, forests, waters, metals, mountains, winds, etc. But Nature discovered in such a way is entirely relative to handling: these are "raw materials" [matières premières]. We do not have a forest but wood, waters are hydroelectric power, the mountain is a quarry, wind is wind in the sail. (MHO 20)^{xvi}

Here--again maybe with, maybe without Heidegger--Levinas's referral (renvoi) "back to materials" opens up the structure of finitude as always referring, ceaselessly to an other lying outside any particular being. This is the Derridean structure of the supplement: the requirement that any "pure" being always be less and more than itself--in its division from and dependence upon an other outside it--in order for it to be what it is. No pure forest as such "in nature," always the wood to which it refers forward and which refers back to it. No pure waters but rather the hybrid technological formation of the hydroelectric plant which becomes its prosthetic. And, with Heidegger, ". . . no such thing as a man who, solely, is only man" (QCT 31).

Moreover this account of the renvoi even squares, in Levinas's reading of Heidegger, with the important Derridean realisation (mentioned above regarding the case of the Lacanian letter) that not all sendings are guaranteed to arrive. Because sendings are handlings and because sendability is handlability (remembering, for example, that mail that is sent, whether or not it arrives, is nothing without its handling), there is always the possibility that it will go astray, that the tool will not work, that the hammer will break. Interestingly enough, for Levinas, it is under these circumstances that the tool changes its status for us in terms of its, and our, being in the world:

We have emphasized that the tool is lost in some way within the function which it serves; it is thus that it exists in itself. However, when the tool is damaged, it stands out against the system in relation to which it exists [est] and loses its character of being a tool, so to speak, in order to become, in a certain way, a simple presence. In this momentary loss of handlability, the "referral in view of which the tool exists" [renvoi à ce en vue de quoi l'ustensile est], is achieved. It awakens, stands out, comes to light. And we are turned in that manner toward the totality of the system of referrals--a totality always implicitly understood but not till then emphasized. Here is

a series of referrals which can only be realized in an “in-view-of-which” which is no longer in view of some other thing but in view of itself. We recognize Dasein itself in this structure. Put another way, understanding of the tool only comes about in relation to an initial understanding of Dasein’s structure, which, in virtue of the “referral to itself” [renvoi à soi-même] proper to Dasein, allows a glimpse within the things themselves of their handlability, their possible usage, their “in-view-of.” (MHO 20)

If we were to read this into the Derridean account of sending and the essential possibility of adestation (adestinality), we would see that, peculiarly, when the letter (as just one kind of equipment) works normally--when it arrives as expected--it is in fact “lost.” Its ordinary working places it beneath the horizon of our noticing it as a particular kind of presence. Then, by contrast, when it fails to arrive as expected (when, as a tool, it fails to work), it stands out against the system of referrals (renvois), it loses its character (of being “lost” within that system), so to become “a simple presence.” When it works, it is lost (a lost letter). When it is lost in the post, and so doesn’t work, it stands out as a presence-at-hand (remembering that Levinas is contrasting Zuhandenheit with Vorhandenheit in terms of “handlability” and “presence” when we might now speak of the distinction between “readiness-to-hand” and “presence-to-hand”).^{xvii} And while this may be underplayed in the Derridean account of sending and (failure of) arrival, or of handling and of the tool’s being damaged, it may be of the utmost importance. But let us let this stand in reserve for a short while and move on to another possibility and back to the question concerning culture.

Suppose we were to say--too briefly and boldly, for sure--that the whole field of handlability, of Dasein’s equipmentality, of maniabilité, of Zuhandenheit, grounded on Dasein’s finitude, was co-extensive with the field of culture--not as it is thought today via the continuation of representational thinking, but as it might

be thought outside representation. This would leave the whole Derridean analytic of sending (including adestinality, supplementarity, prosthesis and deconstruction) in place as it stands but would ground it, as an account of the renvoi essential to all cultural technologies, on the analytic of finitude and equipmentality as Dasein's primordial relation to other beings-in-the-world (outside and prior to any representationalist account). In this way cultural practice would become the field of what Levinas calls "concrete man": "It is concrete man who appears [now, with Heidegger] at the center of philosophy, and in comparison with him, the concept of consciousness is only an abstraction, arbitrarily separating consciousness--i.e. illumination as illumination--from history and existence" (MHO 24).

This much is, I think, at least one possible upshot of Levinas's reading of Being and Time. To summarise, this would be so in six respects. (1) Levinas reveals the grounds on which all subsequent criticisms of representational thinking can be levelled by Heidegger against modern metaphysics since Descartes. (2) He shows that the envoi that Derrida posits as prior to any idea that representationalism is an undifferentiating "totalisation" of modern metaphysics is, as it turns out, the same as, or very like, the renvoi at the heart of handlability. Hence (3) Derrida's position is effectively an uptake of Heidegger's at least to the extent that it can only be thought once a representational view has already been countered. (4) In this way any deconstructive analysis might be re-grounded in the analytic of finitude such that, for example, (5) the working tool or arriving letter is more essentially lost than that which fails to work or arrive (and which, by contrast, then takes on the secondary ontological status of the present-at-hand (Vorhandene)). (6) At least in potentia, this promises to re-open the field of the cultural, against all and any representationalist characterisations of it, as the domain of equipmentality in its finitude and effectivity.

This last characterisation of culture, however, is far from Heidegger's own. He firmly associates the idea of cultural man not with his early considerations of Dasein's being-in-the-world generally, but with the more local event of modernity itself. For Heidegger, cultural thinking is a mistaken thinking that leads away from questioning of the first rank, that is, from questioning matters in their essence. Almost no other way of thinking is so quickly set aside by Heidegger in favour of philosophical thinking. For example, he begins "Science and Reflection" as follows:^{xviii}

In keeping with a view now prevalent, let us designate the realm in which the spiritual and creative activity of man is carried out with the name "culture." As part of culture, we count science, together with its cultivation and organization. Thus science is ranked among the values man prizes and toward which, out of a variety of motives, he directs his attention.

But so long as we take science only in this cultural sense, we will never be able to gauge the scope of its essence [Wesen]. This is equally the case for art. Even today we readily name these two together: "art and science." Art is also represented as one sphere of cultural enterprise. But then we recognise nothing of its essence. . . .

Science is no more a cultural activity of man than is art. (SAR 155-6)

Accordingly, cultural thinking is always and only the thinking "of man," the man of modernity; it is equivalent to "giv[ing] ourselves up to ordinary notions" (SAR 156) and turning away from whatever is in its essence. Here, and returning to "The Age of the World Picture," culture, as an "essential phenomenon" of modernity, is ranked along with science, technology, art and "the loss of the gods" (Entgötterung). In fact, it is fourth on Heidegger's list after science, technology and art:

A fourth modern phenomenon manifests itself in the fact that human activity is conceived and consummated as culture. Thus culture is the realization (Verwirklichung) of the highest values, through the nurture and

cultivation (Pflege) of the highest goods of man. It lies in the essence of culture, as such nurturing, to nurture itself in its turn and thus become the politics of culture (Kulturpolitik). (AWP 116; 75-76)

While Heidegger drops the question of the “essence” of culture at this point, what he may be thinking here is that, insofar as culture arises only within the age of man’s self-representationality--and as “the highest goods” of so “low” a thinking--it, too, no doubt is subject to representing itself. We must guess here, of course, but this may help us see why culture’s essence (as nurturing) is to nurture “itself in its turn.” In this self-enclosure or self-enframing, and in the consequent impossibility of ever reaching out to beings beyond the realm of man’s self-representation, it becomes confined within what, by 1938, must have seemed to Heidegger to be the very lowest of low thoughts: namely politics. A little later (1940), in the Nihilism lectures, Heidegger offers us some corroboration of this reading when he refers to “The securing of supreme and absolute self-development of all the capacities of mankind for absolute dominion over the entire earth.” This, he says, “is the secret goad that prods modern man again and again to new resurgences” (N4 99). Then, at this point, he offers us examples which, together, form a very useful chronicle of, precisely, the formations that culture (as “the consciously posited binding” of modern man for himself in his dominion) has taken since its clearest enunciation in the Enlightenment:

The consciously posited binding appears in many guises and disguises. The binding can be human reason and its law (Enlightenment), or the real, the factual, which is ordered and arranged by such reason (Positivism). The binding can be a humanity harmoniously joined in all its accomplishments and molded into a beautiful figure (the human ideal of Classicism). The binding can be the development of the power of self-reliant nations, or the “proletariat of all lands,” or individual peoples and races. The binding can be the development of humanity in the sense of the progress of universal rationality. The binding can also be “the hidden seeds of each individual

age," the development of the "individual," the organization of the masses, or both. Finally [coming to Heidegger's own times, via Nietzsche], it can be the creation of a mankind that finds the shape of its essence neither in "individuality" nor in the "mass," but in the "type." (N4 99)^{xix}

No doubt each of these varieties of cultural formation as "consciously posited binding" deserves detailed investigation. What is important for us, here, however, is that, despite the apparent variety of "ways of being cultural"--a variety that sometimes dazzles contemporary cultural theory and, at all times, provides the field with its deepest entrenchments and debates--every such way is, at ground, a function of modernity and representational thinking. This comes to light when, again in the Nihilism lectures, Heidegger makes this connection between culture and the representational thinking of modernity even clearer by referring to the anachronisms that arise when pre-modern times are thought, retrospectively and erroneously, to be cultures:

And so as soon as valiative thought emerged, there came--and still comes--the empty talk about the "cultural values" of the Middle Ages and the "spiritual values" of antiquity, even though there was nothing like "culture" in the Middle Ages nor anything like "spirit" and "culture" in ancient times. Only in the modern era have spirit and culture been deliberately experienced as fundamental modes of human comportment, and only in most recent times have "values" been posited as standards for such comportment. It does not follow, of course, that earlier periods were "uncultured" in the sense that they were submerged in barbarism; what follows is that with the schemata "culture" and "lack of culture," "spirit," and "value," we never touch in its essence the history, for example, of the Greeks. (N4 17)

Again, what talk of "culture" does is to remove us from the path of thinking that would take us to the essence of, say, history (or science, or art). What it does instead is to offer an anachronistic account of essential history, an

anthropomorphic account of essential science, an “aestheticist” account of the essence of art, and so on. This is what Heidegger means when he says that cultural thinking is anthropological: “Thus today one thought is common to everyone, to wit, an ‘anthropological’ thought, which demands that the world be interpreted in accordance with the image of man and that metaphysics be replaced by ‘anthropology’. In such a demand, a definite decision has already been rendered concerning the relationship of man to beings as such” (N4 86). And that relationship, as Heidegger goes on to show, is precisely Cartesian-representationalist: it is a relationship in which whatever is becomes an “object” for man-as-subject, including among such objects man himself as the being (primary sub-iectum) with the capacity for self-representation.

But is not this supposed “capacity for self-representation,” itself, another way of putting the idea of culture? Is not culture, in at least one of its many “theoretical” manifestations, the idea that men represent men to men (usually of their own “kind” or “nation”)? Heidegger’s list of “bindings,” above, surely says as much. And if, accordingly, we try to step outside this particular and modern kind of thinking of man’s relation to “beings as such,” might we not find, perhaps among other things, on the other side of our stepping out, a reconfiguration of culture that would be--if not identical with, then--extremely close to the account of Dasein’s equipmentality (and ultimately its facticity and finitude)? “Science and Reflection” certainly holds out hope for a re-thinking of science outside “cultural” thinking and therefore “in its essence”; “The Origin of the Work of Art” holds out a similar hope for today’s overly-representationalist (and, therefore, aestheticist) mistakes about art;^{xx} and “The Question Concerning Technology,” once again, holds out a hope that technology might be re-thought in its origins and away from its dominant anthropocentric and instrumentalist readings today. And incidentally, while the question of technology is close to hand, let us remember that Heidegger at one point equates this field, technology, with that of culture

itself: "For technology signifies exactly what 'culture,' which is contemporaneous with it, also signifies" (N4 40). If there is, then, a questioning concerning technology (or more precisely, Technik, technological thinking), why should there not be a questioning concerning culture--a questioning that tries to think culture in its essence as opposed to representationally, "ordinarily," within the cognitive field of modernity?

But have we not already read Heidegger on the essence of culture? Did he not announce it as being that nurturing of the highest values of modern man which must eventually nurture itself and so become Kulturpolitik? Yes, this is true. But there is also a sense in which culture, above science, technology, art and, perhaps, "the loss of the gods," is, for Heidegger, quintessentially a phenomenon (Erscheinung) of modernity and nothing but. When, therefore, he speaks of its "essence," this is always an essence confined to modernity and, so, to representational thinking. As opposed to this limit, in posing the question of culture in its essence, then, I mean to open the possibility--without the anachronistic effect of simply transferring the culture of modernity to previous ages or to non-Western peoples--of seeing how culture, too, along with science, technology and art, might conceal something more fundamental when thought differently: that is, when thought out with its "Heideggerian" positioning as the essential thinking of modernity itself. This will lead us eventually to ask whether the "nurturing"--or, as the translator puts it, the "nurture and cultivation"--the Pflege, of which Heidegger speaks, might not reach outside and beyond the confines of a nurturing and cultivation of representational thought by itself and for itself. On the way to that thought, we might draw some parallels with the problem of technology which, as we have seen, Heidegger practically equates with culture.

To draw a first parallel with “The Question Concerning Technology,” we can notice, among other things, the following.^{xxi} Heidegger is well known for his fundamental critique of technologies, especially in “The Question Concerning Technology,” but also throughout his middle and later periods. At root, however, Heidegger’s aversion is actually reserved for modern technologies, and not for technology as such, “in its essence.” He expresses his distaste for the hydroelectric plant--Levinas, above, notwithstanding--but not for the fishing hook and, at the same time, argues that technology in its essence (as opposed to modern technologies) “is a mode of revealing.” That is “[t]echnology comes to presence [west] in the realm where revealing and unconcealment take place, where alétheia, truth, happens” (QCT 13). But it is this very thinking of technology’s essence that has been, Heidegger argues, deleted from our modern technologies, making a deep cut or decision between old (authentic) and new (inauthentic) modes of thinking.

The “problem” of modern technology, for Heidegger, is the form of revealing that it conceals. This is the form of revealing called “Enframing” (Ge-stell), a form which technology shares with modern science, albeit that the latter precedes the former historically. Enframing “is the gathering together that belongs to that setting-upon which sets upon man and puts him in position to reveal the real, in the mode of ordering, as standing-reserve [Bestand]” (QCT 24). “Standing-reserve,” here, refers to a thinking of nature’s energy as capable of being stored for later use. By contrast with poiésis (bringing-forth) as another and very different mode of revealing, science and technology as the revealing that is Enframing, are ruled by a “challenging” or “challenging forth” (Herausfordern) of nature (QCT 14). This, by contrast with bringing-forth, “puts to nature the unreasonable demand that it supply energy that can be extracted and stored as such” (QT 14). Poiésis, again by contrast, makes no such unreasonable demand. Rather it cares for, which is to say “nurtures,” nature. (And here we have our first

clue to a possible re-thinking of culture's own "nurturing and cultivation" outside modernity; but this must still wait a while for a fuller consideration.) Hence, for now, we must consider the "negative" revealing of science and technology as Enframing and challenging in some more depth.

Immediately following the account of challenging as the extraction of energy from nature and its storage, Heidegger asks the following question and introduces a concrete example: "But does this [the demand for the extraction and storage of energy] not hold true for the old windmill as well? No. Its sails do indeed turn in the wind; they are left entirely to the wind's blowing. But the windmill does not unlock energy from the air currents in order to store it" (QCT 14). The "No," in this case, is of the utmost importance for Heidegger's thinking of technology. Without this particular turn in the maze of his thinking, the whole argument for the distinction between ancient and modern technologies, and with it the argument for Enframing as the peculiar characteristic of modern technology's revealing, is in doubt. Without it, the maze goes unsolved. And has Levinas not already said that, in the analytic of Dasein's equipmentality: "We do not have a forest but wood, waters are hydroelectric power, the mountain is a quarry, wind is wind in the sail"? If this is eternally true for Dasein, as man's "openness for Being" in general, then we might expect it to be as true of the old windmill as it is of the hydroelectric plant. Is there not a sense in which, then, the old milling techniques are, through and through, matters of the harnessing of natural energy for later use? The mill, that is, may be used to grind corn or other cereal crops. And what is this corn but the stored energy of the earth, the sun, the rain (or the rivers) and, not least, of the farmhand's labour? Is the corn not then set aside, placed in standing reserve, until there is a sufficient (ordered and calculable) quantity for milling? And then, in the mill itself, is the wind's energy not harnessed so that grain may be extracted from this standing-reserve of corn, and so that the grain itself may be stored up in granaries for later use? And, in the

transformation of the grain into, say, bread, is there not a further extraction and storage of energy through the technologies of the oven and their dependence on a stored and measurable supply of fuel? In all of these “old” processes we find, as it were, not so much an absence of Enframing and standing-reserve as the operation of referrals (renvois): the bread in the oven refers back, makes a back reference, to the store of grain which makes a back reference to the mill and the wind which, together, make a back reference to the store of cereal which makes a back reference to the earth, the sun, the rain and to labour. Here, then, we begin to question the centrality of Enframing (as the kind of revealing that challenges forth) as essentially peculiar to modern technologies.^{xxii}

Still it has to be said that technology, thought as Enframing-revealing, has two different statuses later in Heidegger’s path of questioning. As a kind of revealing at all, it can be the “saving power” and so return us to technology as techné, and thence as poiésis, as bringing forth. Only as the Enframing-revealing does technology constitute the “supreme danger” in that Enframing is held to be the kind of revealing that lets all beings (including man) only ever be revealed as standing-reserve and therefore threatens all revealing as such:

. . . Enframing does not simply endanger man in his relationship to himself and to everything that is. As a destining, it banishes man into that kind of revealing which is an ordering. Where this ordering holds sway, it drives out every other possibility of revealing which, in the sense of poiésis, lets what presences come forth into appearance. As compared with that other revealing, the setting-upon that challenges forth thrusts man into a relation to that which is, that is at once antithetical and rigorously ordered. Where Enframing holds sway, regulating and securing of the standing-reserve mark all revealing. They no longer even let their own fundamental characteristic appear, namely, this revealing as such. (QCT 27)

But, with the case of the old windmill, we have seen that, if even the old technologies (and, by extension, even the oldest of them such as the fishing hook) extract and store up energy as standing-reserve, then there never is, in any technology, “this revealing as such.” Moreover, there is never not ordering or calculation: for example the first writings in the cuneiform of the Sumerians (which eventually, via many referrals and eventually via the Phoenicians, becomes the alphabet of the Greeks themselves), it is now recognised, were ways of accounting.^{xxiii} They were used to calculate and order the transportation of stored goods (corn, sheep, slaves and so on) from one market to another so as to ensure that the goods sent were, as far as possible, a destination notwithstanding, identical with the goods that arrived.^{xxiv} That is, the technology of writing itself is, from the beginning, a series of renvois, pointing to (Ver-weisen) a standing-reserve of “natural” energy stored in granaries, herds and colonies, inter alia. Then, insofar as technology is a revealing, it is never not an “impure” or “contaminated” revealing. If there are never not renvois, then there is never “pure” techné, poiésis that is not “technological” in this sense. The essence of technology, in whatever age, is this refrability.

For all of this, throughout his work, Heidegger also offers a different but related account of “science” (as in natural science) and a slightly different (but also related) reason for its “metaphysical” error: science falls away from the true path of thinking (metaphysics) insofar as it makes a particular cut or de-cision.^{xxv} In reading the whole of physis as limited to “physical nature” and annexing this domain to itself, scientific thinking confines itself to the merely ontic-factual aspect of physis as a whole. Its decision here (albeit unthought and unthinkable by science) is to put the truly ontological side of the ontic-ontological difference to one side.^{xxvi} In this respect, today, there can be no such thing as a “science of being,” only sciences of particular beings such as atoms, stars and bacteria.

By extension of this account--since, as we have seen, technologies today are held to rely on the same kind of revealing as science--modern technologies, as the ordering of nature as standing-reserve, arise and come to presence in the same way as scientific calculation. They exist, then, as a further step away from the thinking path towards being. In short, all modern forms of technology are instances of merely ontic thinking. They attest to an inauthenticity of all modern beings towards the truth of their being and, in this sense, they could not be further removed from technology "in its essence" as the realm where truth (as unconcealment or "true" revealing) happens.

Note then that the problem of technology can be seen to arise from a decision of Heidegger's about how to treat a decision of science's. The first decision cuts modern (inauthentic) technology away from something else, presumably its more authentic pre-scientific form. (Homeric poetic making might be one such pre-scientific form.) But--because, as we have seen, it may be impossible to separate ancient from modern technologies on the grounds that only the latter are instances of Enframing--this assumes that a moral (normative/evaluative) decision must come either in advance of, or simultaneously with, a metaphysical decision: a decision about the moral inauthenticity of the merely ontic in thinking comes with, that is, a decision in the natural sciences and in modern technological thinking to confine themselves to the merely ontic. And what this cuts away, in advance, is the possibility of thinking a general condition of all technology (whether "in its essence" or in its modern manifestations) as the sheer equipmentality or having ready-to-hand of Dasein that we have encountered in Levinas's reading of Being and Time. In that earlier work, as we saw, the investigation of the understanding of being leads inevitably to a picture of Dasein's understanding as essential equipmentality or handlability which, in its turn, always refers back to referral (renvoi, Verweisung) as its structural condition. Moving back to that thought, then, we might begin to see how

technology and, therefore, culture as such is the “making” we encounter in that domain of physis in which beings arise and come to presence through human making (rather than on their own account). And as support for this possibility we might refer, again, to “The Age of the World Picture” where Heidegger, himself thinking back to Being and Time, states:

The concept of world [der Weltbegriff] as it is developed in Being and Time is to be understood only from within the horizon of the question concerning “openness for Being” [Da-sein], a question that, for its part, remains closely conjoined with the fundamental question concerning the meaning of Being (not with the meaning of that which is). (AWP 141; 100)

All of this, then, mutatis mutandis, could be equally true for culture--with a single exception. That is, while technological thinking emerges in a very direct relation to scientific thinking (at least in a certain sense), this cannot be the case for cultural thinking. On the contrary, we have already seen how, in “Science and Reflection” the mistake is to count science as part of culture.^{xxvii} In order for this particular trope of modern anthropologism to occur, cultural thinking would have to have its origin completely outside scientific thinking as such. In this case, we might say that just as scientific thinking begins by thinking only of natural objects (physical nature) as the whole of physis, so cultural thinking makes the parallel mistake of thinking only of synthetic or man-made objects (“technical” nature) as all there can possibly be. These mistakes are similar but have vastly different consequences for the two fields in question. Whereas scientism, for example, might reduce all human activity to its biological or physiological bases as a consequence of its mistaken cutting of physis, culturalism (as per the opening of “Science and Reflection”) tends in the opposite direction by trying to argue that, when the scientist sees only a biological or physiological organism when he considers a man, what he is actually seeing is an effect of the specific cultural conventions of science. In this way such thinking as the relativistic philosophy of science can emerge, as well as talk of the “social construction” of scientific

worldviews, paradigms and so on. If this is what Heidegger means by “culture” -- a reduction of everything to “the spiritual and creative activity of man” -- then he is surely right to criticise culturalist forms of thinking.

On the other hand, just as technology can ultimately be rethought as a matter of techné onta (things which arise and come to presence in man’s care and nurturing), culture most immediately can be re-thought as cultura which had, for the Romans, the sense of caring for and nurturing initially plants (cultura agri) and, eventually, the mind and the intelligence (cultura animi).^{xxviii} The term translates the Greek paideía (παιδεία). This stems from paîs (παῖς): a child (in the family sense, a son or a daughter); a child (in relation to age or stage of life); the legal issue (of animals); a slave or servant (man or maid). The Oxford has an entry for the anglicised version of this term, “pædeia”:

In ancient Greek society: education or upbringing; more gen., a society’s culture; the sum of physical and intellectual achievement to which the human body and mind can aspire. [Then in a particular cited use of the term:] “The sum total of all ideal perfections of mind and body.”

Now while it would be easy enough to set upon the use of the word “culture” in this definition, this would block any deeper thinking. For if we turn to Liddel and Scott, we find that paideía refers, for the Greeks, primarily to rearing, bringing up, nurturing.^{xxix} It means, certainly, the rearing of a child and so training and teaching, what we would now call education out of the Latin educare, “I lead out.” But whereas the Latin and the English contain the sense that something lies “within,” already, that must subsequently be led out, the Greek has more the sense of caring for and nurturing the being. Yet that nurturing is by no means “indulgent” (what we would now, perhaps, call “child-centred”) for paideía also means chastisement (in the service of good breeding and proper conduct). This “in the service of” is so critical that paideía is also the result of rearing and training: mental “culture,” learning. It is anything taught or learned: art, science,

medicine. There is no split here between “means” and “ends”: in this sense, Heidegger’s view that causality in the modern sense by no means applies to Greek thinking is correct. Hence paideía can also be what it is that is nurtured: youth, childhood and (in the collective sense) a body of youths. We must think paideía, then, as nurturing in a primary sense: as both a sending of a being on its way and as the way that it is sent upon; as well as what it is (the being) that is so sent. And we must say “a being,” meaning “any being” (not just a human child), because, even in Greek times, the word paideía refers also to the cultivation and care of trees as well as, perhaps more rarely and obscurely, ropes of papyrus, “the twisted handiwork of Egypt.”^{xxx}

Paideía, then, as the sending forth towards (adulthood, fruition or whatever “destination”), is extremely close to the senses of envoi and renvoi. Renvoi (Levinas, Derrida) is a continual re-sending and translates the German Verweisung (Heidegger).

Thought as paideía, however, Ver-weisung sits within every action related to weisen, to point, to impart instruction by showing.^{xxxi} Verweisen is primarily to refer but also to relegate (say, to second place) and, in terms of the paideía not working, it is also to send out, to expel (for example, from school); and this sense of the verb is most clearly captured by the word-family member ausweisen. Verweisen is also to direct or refer a person to someone as an authority, and, as well, to direct or refer someone’s attention to something. One related verb is wegweisen, to point the way; hence Wegweiser (signpost). The word-family obviously has a sense of directing elsewhere (either towards growth and fruition or else towards banishment and lostness--the result cannot be decided in advance). This is most aptly captured by hinweisen, to direct (someone) there, to show the way there, to indicate, to draw (someone’s) attention to, to point there (as of a signpost). And, assuming the arrival is successful, we get nachweisen, to

prove, to establish and hence the noun Nachweisung, reference, information. Then, once again approaching paideía itself, we find anweisen, to give directions, instructions, orders; to assign, allocate, allot. Then, perhaps, reaching paideía itself, we find unterweisen, to instruct and die Unterweisung, instruction.

Cultural thinking, then, might be re-configured as “paedetics,” the understanding of the field of Dasein’s equipmentality (its manner, ways and techniques) insofar as this field has to do with the particular task of bringing beings out--through a pointing out, a sending of them along their way, towards a destination that may or may not be reached.^{xxxii}

I, for one, do not know if such a re-thinking of culture is possible. But it does seem clear that, in its absence, we are left, in today’s cultural disciplines and cultural “sciences” with little more than idle chatter about world pictures and their currently fashionable theoretical equivalents which, if Heidegger is right, are no more than forms of testimony to an event through which we happen, still, to be living: namely, modernity, the age of the world-as-picture. In this case, all the cultural disciplines could do would be to repeat the condition of their own event: ceaselessly picturing pictures. For example, cultural studies continues to investigate the veracity or otherwise of the “representation” of one sector or another of society in one cultural medium or another. Semiotics and critical linguistics continue to debate the adequacy of particular signs in terms of their signifiatory and social effects as representations. Media studies, too, tells us that the age of the word is over and that the age of the image is coming to replace it: but this supposed change itself only bears witness to the continuation of modernity. Meanwhile anthropologists continue to do “fieldwork” on what they imagine to be, by virtue of their involvement in the event of modernity, “cultures”; that what they investigate may not even be such cannot occur to them, for such a reflection is itself, essentially, un-anthropological. Historical research,

too, goes on into the world pictures of all sorts of ancient civilisations--again regardless of the fact that only a fundamental anachronism allows them to be pictured this way; which is to say, pictured at all. No doubt countless other instances could be brought to bear from everywhere within the range and breadth of the humanities and social sciences.

And, though by now it may be too late (for this paper and for those of us still with an interest in culture and its meaning), this returns us to the fundamental importance for our times of Heidegger's opening remarks which I shall repeat here:

In metaphysics reflection [die Besinnung] is accomplished concerning the essence [das Wesen] of what is [des Seienden] and a decision [eine Entscheidung] takes place regarding the essence of truth [das Wesen der Wahrheit]. Metaphysics grounds an age [ein Zeitalter], in that through a specific interpretation of what is [eine bestimmte Auslegung des Seienden] and through a specific comprehension of truth [eine bestimmte Auffassung der Wahrheit] it gives to that age the basis [Grund] upon which it is essentially formed. This basis holds complete dominion over all the phenomena [Erscheinungen] that distinguish the age. Conversely, in order that there may be an adequate reflection upon these phenomena themselves, the metaphysical basis for them must let itself be apprehended in them. Reflection is the courage [der Mut] to make the truth of our own presuppositions and the realm of our own goals into the things that most deserve to be called in question. (AWP 115; 75)

It is perhaps at this point that we can see the critical relevance of this passage for us today. What it tells us, among other things, is that, firstly, the basis upon which our age, the age of modernity, is essentially formed is the metaphysics of representation--and nor are we out of it. A reflection has been accomplished and a de-cision (a cut) has taken place such that the essence of truth, today, as for

several centuries before, is that what is (what we call “objects” and “things”) is always an effect of, and that which is made to stand before, man as the representing being (what we call a “subject” or a “consciousness”). This, above all, effects the way we think about (for sure, who we are, but also, and by extension, about) what can be. And this is the announcement of our limits.

All of this overtakes and has precedence over any version or vision of the world that we might want to picture within those limits. But at the same time, we owe it to ourselves that, at least from time to time, we should stop--not for a moment, but seriously stop--and reflect on these limits and wonder whether we can begin to think outside them. That reflection (die Besinnung)--and here the buck stops--would itself be an instance of metaphysics, though not necessarily of the dominant metaphysics of our age. The word that describes our ability to stop and reflect (in the sense of the passage just re-quoted) and, thereby, to engage (in) metaphysics, is “courage” [der Mut]. The question now is whether we--and only those still immersed in a certain kind of representational thinking would ask “What do you mean by ‘We’?”--have that courage.

If that courage is there then we might begin with the following questions:

What need of “postmodernity,” let alone “postmodernism,” when clearly there has not yet been a counter-modernity and no signs of it on the horizon?

What need of moves “against metaphysics” when clearly it’s a metaphysical investigation that we need, precisely as reflection?

Why the currently fashionable trend against “realism” and “essentialism” when it’s precisely the question of the real--or, more correctly, of being--and its essence

(Wesen) that the cultural disciplines need to confront and simply can't do so in their current configurations--for all their talk of "theory"?

Endnotes

- i Martin Heidegger, "The Age of the Word Picture," trans. W. Lovitt, in The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays (New York: Garland, 1997), 115-154. "Die Zeit des Weltbildes," in Gesamtausgabe, Band 5: Holzwege (Frankfurt: Klosterman, 1977), 75-113. (Subsequent references cited parenthetically as AWP followed by the relevant page numbers of the English and German editions).
- ii Oswald Spengler, The Decline of the West (London: Allen and Unwin, 1932). Karl Mannheim, "On the Interpretation of Weltanschauung," in his Essays on the Sociology of Knowledge, ed. P. Kecskemeti (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1952), 33-88. E.M.W. Tillyard, The Elizabethan World Picture (London: Penguin/Chatto and Windus, 1963). Lucien Goldmann, The Hidden God (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1964). Michel Foucault, The Order of Things (London: Tavistock, 1970).
- iii J. G. Herder, Reflections on the Philosophy of the History of Mankind, trans. F. E. Manuel (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969).
- iv Arthur Schopenhauer, The World as Will and Representation Vol. 1, trans. E.F.J. Payne (New York: Dover, 1969) 3.
- v Schopenhauer (1969, xii). By contrast, Heidegger writes: "Schopenhauer's main work, The World as Will and Representation, with its altogether superficial and scanty analysis of Platonic and Kantian philosophy, gathers up in one all the basic directions of the Western interpretation of beings as a whole, although everything there is uprooted and cast down on the level of understanding befitting the positivism then on the rise." Martin Heidegger, Nietzsche Vol.4: Nihilism, trans. F.A. Capuzzi (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1982) 181. (Subsequent references cited parenthetically as N4).
- vi Jacques Derrida, "Sending: On Representation," trans. P. Caws and M.A. Caws, Social Research, vol. 49, no. 2 (1982) 294-326. The original title, "Envoi" will sometimes be used for this paper to resonate with another of Derrida's pieces, the "Envois," in La Carte postale, de Socrate à Freud et au-delà (Paris: Flammarion, 1980). (Subsequent references cited parenthetically as SOR).

vii As Derrida's translators point out, while Geschick is often translated as fate or destiny, "the German equivalent of 'envoyer' is 'schicken', and in Heidegger the term 'Geschick' . . . occurs in connection with the emergence of the idea of Being, which is as it were 'sent out' from some origin as 'destined'" (SOR 294). In Heidegger, too, it is made to resonate with the word Geschichte, history. The long footnote to the second page (page 37) of the English translation of "The Turning" is also worth consulting in this respect, particularly since it lists "skill, aptitude, fitness" among the translations of Geschick. See Martin Heidegger, "The Turning," trans. W. Lovitt, in The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays (New York: Garland, 1997) 36-49.

viii Martin Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology," trans. W. Lovitt, in The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays (New York: Garland, 1997) 3-35. (Subsequent references cited parenthetically as QCT).

ix Martin Heidegger, Being and Time, trans. J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1962).

x Emmanuel Levinas, "Martin Heidegger and Ontology," Diacritics, vol. 26, no. 1 (1996) 11-32. (Subsequent references cited parenthetically as MHO).

xi We should note with respect to this passage (including the part of it quoted just prior) that what is effected here is not just that the sub-iectum becomes man--which is the case--but also that man becomes the primary [ersten], even the only [eigentlichen], sub-iectum. In a clarifying passage, that is, Heidegger states, with respect to the sub-iectum in general, that: "We must first remove the concept 'man'--and therefore the concepts 'I' and 'I-ness' as well--from the concept of the essence of subiectum. Stones, plants and animals are subjects--something lying-before of itself--no less than man is" (N4 97). In this respect we should read the advent of modernity not just as the becoming-subject of man but also, and more importantly, as man becoming the first, and so, for himself, as far as he is concerned, the only subject.

xii This version of Heidegger's reading of the event of the cogito comes from his lecture on Nietzsche's nihilism at a point just prior to his own cross-reference to "The Age of the World Picture" (see the footnote to N4 90). The "World Picture" essay was composed in 1938 and the lecture in 1940; and the point of the cross-reference is to make the reader aware that the Protagorean view that "man is the measure of all things" has a distinct meaning from its modern interpretations (which ally it with the Cartesian position). The ensuing 14th section of the Nihilism lecture (N4 91-95) and the 8th appendix to "The Age of the World Picture" (AWP 143-47; 102-106) both deal with this misinterpretation. Each is important as a corrective to anachronistic "re-discoveries" of modern subjectivism in the Greeks. The 15th section of the lecture on "The Dominance of the Subject in the Modern Age" (N4 96-101) is a useful adjunct to the discussion of the sub-iectum in "The Age of the World Picture".

xiii In an extended footnote on the term das Wesen ("essence"), the editor of the Nihilism lectures notes that "Heidegger emphasized the verbal sense of wesen as 'governing' or 'effecting,' while retaining the fundamental reference to 'presencing.'" (N4 140). This should be taken into account in every use of the word "essence" in this paper, especially that in the final sentence.

xiv Later in this paper, we will unpack the term Verweisung.

xv Derrida himself first uses the term renvois, in the plural, which his translators render as "back-references," close to the end of his Envoi (SOR 324). A different use of the term renvoi--via Jakobson--for grounding a pre-Cartesian semiotics, can be found in John Deely, New Beginnings: Early Modern Philosophy and Postmodern Thought (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994) 201-244.

xvi I halt the quotation at this point to leave behind a trace of the importance of Levinas's mention of the hydroelectric plant, a critical trope in Heidegger's "The Question Concerning Technology". This is taken up again a little later.

xvii Hence this "simple presence" is not that referred to by Derrida as Anwesenheit (above). It is rather the "natural objectness" (Vorhandenheit) that only arises

subsequently to, and on the ground of, readiness-to-hand (Zuhandenheit). Both of these terms (though they may badly translate into “natural” as against “cultural” objects) are explicitly counterposed to the idea of simple immediate presence of any kind.

xviii Martin Heidegger, “Science and Reflection,” trans. W. Lovitt, in The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays (New York: Garland, 1997) 155-182. (Subsequent references cited parenthetically as SAR).

xix While not essential to our account here, how Heidegger goes on to describe the “type,” and Nietzsche’s version of it as Overman, is instructive in terms of the very cultural history that Heidegger rarely considers. He concludes: “Precursors here are the Prussian soldiery and the Jesuit Order, which are characterized by a peculiar meshing of their essential natures, a meshing in which the inner content of the first historical emergence of each can be almost completely ignored” (N4 100).

xx Martin Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” trans. D. Farrell Krell, in Basic Writings (London: Routledge, 1993) 143-206.

xxi The account following is based on a draft paper with the working title “Five Theses on Culture”.

xxii Another relevant line of investigation might be Heidegger’s discussion--at the very end of “The Age of the World Picture” (noting that we began with its beginning)--of the gigantic (das Riesenhafte/ das Riesige) as distinctive of “the modern age” (AWP 135-136). This is interesting for two reasons in the present context. First, the gigantic, Heidegger notes, “evidences itself simultaneously in the tendency toward the increasingly small.” Second, it is “that through which the quantitative becomes a special quality and thus a remarkable kind of greatness [des Großen]” (AWP 135; my emphasis). This co-dependence of and between, to use a shorthand, the micro and the macro, and the quantitative and the qualitative might need to be subjected to the kind of respecification I am attempting here vis-à-vis Enframing. I thank James Cahill for suggesting such a project.

xxiii See Georges Ifrah, "Was Writing Invented by Accountants?" in his From One to Zero: A Universal History of Numbers (New York: Viking, 1985) 51-169.

xxiv See Denise Schmandt-Besserat, "Envelopes that Bear the First Writing," Technology and Culture, vol. 21, no. 3 (1980) 357-385; "From Token to Tablets: A Re-evaluation of the So-called Numerical Tablets," Visible Language, vol. 15, no. 4 (1981) 321-344; "The Emergence of Recording," American Anthropologist, vol. 84 (1982) 872-876; "Tokens: Facts and Interpretation," Visible Language, vol. 20, no. 3 (1986) 250-273.

xxv See section 23 of the Nihilism lectures on the ontological difference (N4 150-158).

xxvi In the third Nietzsche volume, Heidegger argues as follows. "Every science rests upon propositions about the area of beings within which its every investigation abides and operates. These propositions about beings--about what they are--propositions that posit and delimit the area, are metaphysical propositions. Not only can they not be demonstrated by the concepts and proofs of the respective sciences, they cannot even be thought appropriately in this way at all." Heidegger, I think tellingly, calls these "field propositions." The sciences use such things. Metaphysics, by contrast, reflects upon and questions them. The field propositions of the sciences, that is, are among (but do not exhaust) the "objects" of the "discipline" of philosophy. Can the scientist carry out such a reflection at all, ever? "To be able to carry out metaphysical reflection concerning his field, the scientific researcher must therefore transpose himself into a fundamentally different kind of thinking; he must become familiar with the insight that this reflection on his field is something essentially different from a mere broadening of the kind of thinking otherwise practiced in research, whether that broadening be in degree or scope, in generalization, or even in what he sees as a degeneration." Martin Heidegger, Nietzsche, Vol. 3: The Will to Power as Knowledge and as Metaphysics, trans. J. Stambaugh, D. Farrell Krell and F.A. Capuzzi (New York: Harper and Row, 1987) 41-43.

xxvii This distinction is made even clearer in the Nihilism lectures where Heidegger writes of "cultural activities--politics, science, art, society" (N4: 195).

xxviii See Kevin Wilson and Jan van der Dusen, eds., The History of the Idea of Europe (London: Routledge, 1995) 62.

xxix H.G. Liddel and R. Scott, A Greek-English Lexicon, 9th edition (London: Oxford University Press, 1940). (Revised edition 1994).

xxx This is actually among Liddel and Scott's definitions.

xxxi Thanks to Horst Ruthrof for this understanding of the several related German verbs; also to the incomparable work of the Australian German scholar, R. B. Farrell whose Dictionary is a treasure for English-speaking readers of that language. R.B. Farrell, Dictionary of German Synonyms, 3rd edition (London: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

xxxii One place to begin such an inquiry might be with Foucault's discussions, in The Use of Pleasure, of asceses as exercises or essays towards truth among the ancient Greeks. See Michel Foucault, The Use of Pleasure: The History of Sexuality Volume 2, trans. R. Hurley (London: Penguin, 1987). Another place might be Ian Hunter's work. Hunter has shown how 19th century forms of cultural thinking and theorising, whether Romantic or Marxist in fundamental inspiration, were actually forms of training in the correct comportment of the critical intellectual who had to balance the life of the body with the life of the mind and the spirit, each keeping the other in check as a practical ascesis of equilibrium. Ian Hunter, "Setting the Limits to Culture," in G. Turner, ed., Nation, Culture, Text: Australian Cultural Studies (London: Routledge, 1993) 140-163.